1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4 •
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Zaire FO1

[NET HUNTERS]

[P. 217-C]

comparison with the *nkumbi* as described by Schebesta for the archers.

In the Epulu region the *nkumbi* takes place every three years. It is organized and conducted throughout by the villagers, who invite the Mbuti to take part. The first part of the year, from the dry season onward, is considered most suitable. On this particular occasion there were no village boys of the right age, but the villagers (Bira and Ndaka) went ahead with the arrangements as usual. The fact that only Pygmy boys were to be initiated made no difference to the celebrations, which were conducted in the village with full enthusiasm, bringing villagers from as far as 50 miles away. Villagers allowed themselves to be beaten with long sapling whips (Fig. 46) "to give strength" to the Mbuti candidates.

After a week of preliminary festivities, on the day of the first circumcision, the *makata* sticks (a set of eight or nine resonant sticks tuned to a specific scale) were cut and sounded. The *makata* are heard only during a period of initiation and are destroyed simultaneously with the initiation camp at the end of the festival. Villagers and Pygmies joined in a dance with the *makata*, while others went into the forest a short distance to make a clearing for the initiation camp.

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Fig. 46. Initiation whip, **mbeke**, Bira villagers, Central Ituri.

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as being masters, and their help is constantly being sought by villagers, not so well versed in forest lore. It has been shown, however, that where the Mbuti see a remedy that is more effective than theirs, such as modern drugs (only in some cases are these apparently superior), they will eventually seek them. Insofar as local dispensaries were run by villagers, the Mbuti had to rely on the villagers for such drugs. I do not consider this an instance of dependence, however, as up to the end of my last field trip the Mbuti would only seek such help when they were in the village; in the forest they found their own remedies adequate. Even more, when sickness or injury befell them in the village, the common reaction was to return to the forest.

But here we may note a significant difference in attitude to magic, or curative activity. Childbirth is a time which is thought of by both Mbuti and villagers as being attended by the possibility of danger, at least. The Mbuti think in terms of physical danger, and they have precautions that they take in the diet and behavior of the expectant mother before birth, and apparently effective knowledge of midwifery, including recognized ways of dealing with difficult births. After birth there are known cures for any weakness the infant or mother might show. What is lacking, among the Mbuti, is precisely what is dominant among the villagers: a felt need for protection against the supernatural.

A village mother and child will both have, according to how wealthy the family is, a number of potions to drink (which may or may not have medical significance, but are thought of as being protective) and divers charms to wear. The protection is thought to be necessary against *unknown* dangers. The difference between the two peoples is in the extent of this unknown. An Mbuti infant will have a vine bracelet or belt tied to it almost immediately after birth, and a small piece of wood or two will be fixed to the vine. It is stated that the vine and the wood convey to the child the health and strength of the forest. There is no apparent concern for any supernatural dangers, and no precautionary steps taken.

From the village point of view the lack of such measures involves the child and possibly the mother in great danger, and out of self-concern as much as out of concern for the Mbuti, the villagers proffer charms in abundance to expectant mothers and newborn children. However, the need is only felt by the villagers, not by the Mbuti.

This is precisely the difference we find when we seek other situations for which only the villagers have a cure—they are situations in

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effective. The only indication of band interest in birth is the prohibition against married women procuring abortions, which are known and sometimes practiced among the unmarried girls, though rarely.

As far as the nuclear family is concerned the event arouses considerable happiness, and the mother's female age mates may gather with her to sing a few *elima* songs to celebrate the blessing of motherhood; a childless woman is regarded as the most unfortunate of beings. A few of the younger youths may show some interest, as the new child will before long become their responsibility for protection and instruction. After a few days, when the child is brought freely into the open, the hunters and elders will fondle it and compliment the parents. The father is as proud as the mother, and just as likely to carry the child around to show it off.

Medical precautions are minimal. The mother is likely to be off on the hunt, or on the trail somewhere when birth takes place; there is no lessening of activity for her during pregnancy. Childbirth is said to be effected easily, with complications only rarely happening. Any woman may act as midwife; the father should not be present. If there is delay the expectant mother may be massaged to help delivery, or she may be brought away from the camp into the forest, and sat close to a tree against which she pulls with a vine rope. Within two hours of delivery, if birth took place in the camp, the mother is apt to appear in the doorway of her hut, with a bundle wrapped in bark cloth held in her arms. Within the same period of time, if birth took place on the trail, she will continue her journey.

Although the father is not present at the birth in person, it must be one of his arrow blades, or formerly a wooden or leaf knife made by him, that will cut the umbilical cord. The blade is kept with the cord until the child is old enough to make a bundle of them both, take them to a stream and bury them where they will get carried away by the next flood waters.

There is also knowledge of a custom of couvade, though I did not find anyone who had practiced it. If the birth is slow, the father takes off all his clothes and his sister-in-law washes and rubs him. She then goes to the place of labor, and when the child is born returns to the father, who must make a token gift before he can clothe himself again.

The father, and the mother's brother, if he is in the camp, cut special vines daily and sprinkle their juices over both the baby and the mother, "to make them strong." Some of these vines contain so much

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846 951 juice that when cut they have to be bent, with both ends upward so that the liquid will not be lost. Sometimes they are cut into chunks and soaked in water that is used for washing the infant.

856 A third precaution that is taken is to tie a vine bracelet around one of the infant's wrists, or around his waist. A small piece of wood may be roughly threaded to the vine, and the stated function is again to give the infant strength, except that with specific reference to the wood, it is frequently said that it "gives the child the strength of the forest."

844 845 778 With regard to preferences among the women as to where they give birth, it varies. But there is unanimity that if there is any difficulty at all, then the right thing to do is to go off away from the camp and into the forest, which will "help." The forest appears quite 778 755 clearly as helper and protector in the vine and wooden medicines and charms, and in the scarification that will take place at the first sign [851 856] of sickness. Even with adults this is done: the skin is cut in a number of small slits with an arrow, and some of the flesh is gouged out. The ashes prepared from forest woods and plants are made into a paste with spittle and rubbed into the wounds. When the skin grows back, the black ash is still visible beneath, and is regarded as a source of the strength and health and happiness that derive from the forest.

846 Both parents are under food restrictions until the baby is old enough to crawl, the main one and the only general one being that they must not eat meat. The father may go hunting, but any meat that falls into his net is divided among the others. More often he stays away from the hunt, sending his net out with some youth. However, somewhere between one and two months after birth, and when the family net has made a particularly successful catch, the father will usually announce that he is eating meat again.

853 The only other restriction placed on the nuclear family by the crisis of birth is the restraint placed on the father, who is forbidden to have sexual intercourse with the mother as long as she is breast-feeding 853 the child. The restriction is quite definitely linked by the Mbuti to 845 the supply of milk, which is also given as the reason for their rather mild aversion to twins. I know of no record of twins who both survived into adulthood, and it is stated that one of them invariably [847] dies. It is also stated that no woman would feed a child at each breast, and I understand that if twins are born, one is simply not fed by the mother, and is taken away and buried by her friends. But there is no fete of twins, and no ritual in connection with their birth or death.

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Finally it may be remarked that whereas in many African societies, including those of the neighboring villagers, birth fixes the social position of an individual through the structural ramifications of kinship, among the Mbuti it achieves the same end, to a less fixed degree, by placing the individual in a specific age group and relating the infant to a specific locality. The child might not be reared in that locality, but the fact will remain valid as a claim to band membership throughout his or her life. Adoption is often agreed upon in order that a child, or even an adult, may return to his natal band, regardless of what kin remain to him there.[1]

It will also be noticed that in the absence of the magical and supernatural protections that are sought for a newly born child among the villagers nearby, there is a lack of concern with the possibility of disaster, and only a concern that the child should be strong. Insofar as this strength is conveyed by washing the baby with the juice of forest vines, tattooing it with forest ashes, and binding it with forest symbols, this may be regarded as sympathetic magic. But it is better regarded as the beginning of a lifetime of close intimacy between the Mbuti and the forest, an intimacy that may or may not give the physical strength it is believed to convey, but that is undoubtedly responsible for the cohesive social strength found in this one omnipresent, omnipotent symbol of Mbuti unity, the forest.

The absence of formal ritual protection and of the invocation of supernatural aid and attention at birth is the first clear indication that for the Mbuti the norm is the good, and that this goodness derives directly from the forest, physically and spiritually. Although birth is primarily the affair of the nuclear family, all members of the band share the pleasure and the pride of the parents, concern themselves with the welfare and education of the child according to the functions of the different age groups, but they do not see that it is necessary to make of birth what we might here call a "spiritual" occasion. In referring to childbirth the men and women alike say, simply, that "it is the work of women, it is what they are for." There is nothing abnormal about the event, nor is there any expectancy of danger or complication, and so the band does not see that it is necessary to intervene with a formal religious festival.

[1] See Table 11 for examples of adoptions of boys and girls among net hunters.

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uals acquire the reputation of possessing the necessary skills. The doctors in particular possess such skills as part of their profession as diviners and curers, but even they recognize manipulative power in others, and do not try to effect a monopoly.

If the magic fails, it is considered that the manipulation was faulty and will be tried again. Several successive failures will be attributed to the intervention of supernatural forces, and will then involve witchcraft or sorcery.

As shown earlier (p. 54 *seq.*), village magic, even regarded as it should be, in context—as scientifically valid—has little to offer the Mbuti. It may nominally impinge upon their world, for there are, for instance, divers forms of magic to protect plantations against Mbuti raiders. But the Mbuti attitude to magic is different, for they recognize village magic as a mere attempt to control a situation, and not as a scientifically valid process. Brought face to face with such magic they may be wary, but primarily they are skeptical.

In their own world the unknowns are far fewer, and the need for control over events scientifically beyond their control is far less keenly felt. Such actions as may be described as magical, pertaining to health, weather or the hunt, involve an identification with the forest, being forms of sympathetic magic. In this respect, then, they are in a sense religious acts, for the forest is regarded as their protector. It would be difficult to determine whether the hunting fire is meant to placate or propitiate the forest, thus being a religious act involving a belief in a spiritual force, or whether it is thought to actively and directly affect the forest game, luring it into the nets. Mbuti attitudes, both expressed and observable, are mixed; the elements of religious belief, however, are never entirely absent.

The protective "magic" used to secure good health for a newborn baby, a vine bracelet and wooden charm, equally involves in a very real sense a religious belief in the power and strength and protectiveness of the forest, as well as making a more truly "magical" connection between the physical strength of the forest vine and trees and the weakness of the newborn baby, using the charms as a medium through which this strength can flow.

All this makes honey magic all the more outstanding, for it accords honey gathering far more ritual attention than is accorded to the economically incomparably more important activities of hunting and gathering. Some of the magic is slight and individual—a piece of bark cloth belonging to a girl or a woman is put in a cleft stick with a piece